

## REPORT OF THE UNFSS REGIONAL BRIEFING SESSION FOR ASEAN

24 October 2013

Holiday Inn Hotel, Clarkfield Angles City, Pampanga  
Philippines

The Regional Briefing Session for the ASEAN Member States, organized by the Philippines Bureau of Agriculture and Fisheries Products Standards (BAFPS), drew participants from Brunei, Lao PDR, Malaysia and the Philippines. The Session was formally addressed by Director Andrew B. Villacorta, Regional Executive Director of the Department of Agriculture Regional Field Unit III Director Villacorta emphasized that food safety is an utmost concern not only of the government but also the private sector and consumer groups. Thus, both parties implemented measures to ensure that a workable and practical food safety control systems are in place. He stressed further that the voluntary sustainability standards (VSS) developed by the private sectors needs to be communicated to the consumers and to the government regulatory agencies to strengthen collaboration.

### **Session 1: Present perspectives, experience and view of Voluntary Sustainability Standards (VSS) – Nexus between regulatory and private standards: discussion on governmental concerns**

#### ***Presentation on UNFSS objectives, added value and priority activities for 2014-2015***

Dr. Ulrich Hoffman of UNCTAD made the introductory presentation regarding the United Nations Forum on Sustainability Standards (UNFSS) objectives, added value and priority activities for 2014-2015. He stressed the importance of voluntary sustainability standards (VSS) in market entry and sustainable development. VSS should be viewed as a tool that can be used to advance sustainable production and consumption methods and capitalize on opportunities.

Dr. Hoffman also enumerated the benefits and costs of VSS focusing on the inter-relationship of yield, price and revenue. He also discussed some key systematic challenges of VSS on multiplicity, with lack of interoperability of VSS as the primary concern since this has a direct relationship on compliance cost. Another key challenge is that of stringent, complex and multi-dimensional standards, which may reinforce marginalization of smallholders and less-developed countries. This is seen to compound the already existing weakness of these stakeholders on capacity. Dr. Hoffman noted that one fear on VSS is that they might directly or indirectly undermine the hard-won disciplines in the WTO agreements on technical barrier to trade (TBT) and sanitary and phyto-sanitary (SPS) measures.

The rationale for the creation of UNFSS includes the representation of VSS as a new meta-governance system for international supply chains, largely outside WTO rules. Dr. Hoffmann observed that developing country governments have pro-active role in surveillance, supporting and facilitating the establishment of a platform for VSS discussions,

and in this respect they can be supported by the UN institutions. The government role can be broken down into five (5) pillars which are: governance/standard-setting, overcoming capacity gaps, devising flanking/support policies, assuring policy coherence and facilitating stakeholder dialogue.

Dr. Hoffman underscored that UNFSS provides a forum for an unbiased and credible policy dialogue that guides and benefits from analytical, empirical and capacity-building activities. The UNFSS also provides a structured approach to promote ownership by developing countries of their role regarding VSS and assures the 'demand-driven nature' of UNFSS activities.

In summary, Dr. Hoffman expressed that he hopes the Briefing will provide the region the information needs to develop a more systematic approach in tackling VSS issues in a more systematic manner in order to maximize the benefits and minimize the cost of implementation especially for small-scale producers and less-developed economies.

### ***VSS from an ASEAN perspective, including their importance for the forthcoming ASEAN common market***

In his presentation, Mr. Noel de Luna, Chief of the International Relations Division of the Philippines' Department of Agriculture, noted that VSS are not always seen to include standards based on food safety. He further expressed that there is a need to rush the development of sustainability criteria as we might lose sight of food safety issues. There should also be an analysis of multiple certification guidelines as some VSS have conflicts with other organizations. Mr. De Luna shared that VSS should not be looked at as static initiative but rather as an evolving one. The ASEAN Member States (AMSs) should always look at other initiatives and are encouraged to ensure that food safety considerations are taken into account. As a final note, Mr. De Luna said that VSS is also an issue of trust and credibility.

### ***Presentation by UNFSS partner organizations (FAO, ITC, UNEP and UNIDO) on relevant VSS activities in the ASEAN region***

The presentation of the efforts and initiatives of the International Trade Centre (ITC) as an agency of the United Nations (UN) that acts as a global, central and neutral repository of information regarding standards was made by Dr. Ulrich Hoffman. He explained to the AMSs that ITC as an office aims to enable businesses engaged in export to succeed globally through providing these businesses with partners and trade development solutions. These solutions presented are geared towards further assisting private sector, trade support institutions and policy makers. Likewise, Dr. Hoffman informed the AMSs that the financial resources used by the ITC in its operations are extra-budgetary and funded by various donor organizations.

Dr. Ulrich also enumerated the technical assistance projects giving particular focus on the support in benchmarking GAP standards – a collaborative effort between ITC and standards organizations. Furthermore, he made a rundown on how the ITC Standards Map <http://legacy.intracen.org/marketanalysis/StandardsMap.aspx> can be used as a tool for comparison and equivalence.

### ***Open Forum***

There was a query on the interrelationship of percentage of growth in trade of crops and growth of standards. In reply Dr. Hoffman explained that in 2014 a couple of workshops on impact assessment and comparative analysis to look into issues such as definition of parameter and measurement of impact will be conducted. In these workshops, however, it is particularly interesting to summarize the information on objectives, planned-achievements in the standards rather than concrete results in practice. Dr. Hoffman also informed that there are only few initiatives that analyze the impact specifically at the enterprise level. He noted that the information base is not elaborate.

A member of the Malaysia delegation inquired, whether carbon mitigation is in the scope of VSS these standards and if there are any available tools for benchmarking carbon credits to VSS in agriculture. Dr. Hoffman replied that a proper carbon credit system in agriculture would come at a very high cost and furthermore, varies a great deal depending on the area since factors like function of soil quality, climate and method of production among others are taken into consideration. Although carbon mitigation is part of the program, developing a benchmarking tool specifically for this is too complex to be addressed.

Dr. Hoffman recognized that projects in agriculture including those related to forestry with the exception of energy-related projects could be submitted to carbon markets, but in his opinion benchmarking based on carbon credit is not justifiable exercise based on existing markets and methodologies

### **Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) programs and commercial GAP standards: Their coexistence and modular approaches to serve different and international market segments**

#### ***Introductory presentation, based on GAP study in Asia***

Dr. Hoffman provided the introduction to GAP, which included its basic definition, the evolution of the concept, contextualization of the national GAP schemes and the various key considerations, and the relationship of various stakeholders in implementing a comprehensive scheme including standards and conformity assessment. He informed that currently the focus of national GAP programs is going beyond the commercial context, and includes other aspects. Dr. Hoffman also provided an example on how the modular system of GAP is implemented in Thailand. Such system started with awareness and training, and accreditation of local and international certification bodies (CBs) with the food safety standard as the minimum and mandatory requirement for farms selling fresh produce both at the domestic and international market. Dr. Hoffman concluded by emphasizing the possible repercussions and opportunities of having a working GAP scheme, coverage for integration, repartition issues specifically on who will pay for the GAP certification, areas for coordination and the importance of setting a vision prior to the implementation of a GAP scheme- whether this is for the domestic market, export market and the approach for carrying-out the program.

#### ***Lessons to be learned from the Thai approach to GAP***

Mr. Chusak Chuenprayoth, Chairman of the ThaiGAP Institute presented the modular approach of implementing GAP in Thailand, highlighting the solution found by the private sector and government to advance the adoption of the scheme by Thai farmers. Initially

there were talks between government agencies, namely the Ministry of Commerce and Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, and private sector organizations such as ThaiGAP Institute and Thai Chamber of Commerce. Six months after the forum, a proposed modular approach was developed. Minimum and mandatory food safety standards were established for all Thai farmers supplying fresh produce at the domestic and export market. To ensure implementation, a massive awareness-training program was established for smallholders who are not compliant with the QGAP (government) standard. The training program focus is on basic safety requirements of fresh fruit and vegetable. It was also recommended that QGAP should be made mandatory through the passing of law but modifications of the guidelines have to be made in order to assist farmer stakeholders to comply within a suitable time frame. On another note, the implementation and certification based on ThaiGAP, a voluntary private standard, will be on a two (2) level approach. Level 2 certification (same standard as QGAP) is for those products meant for domestic retailers and food chain while Level 1 uses the standard that is equivalent with GlobalG.A.P and will be used to certify products that will be exported to countries that require International Food Safety Standard.

### ***The role of ASEAN GAP in the future common market***

The road towards development of the ASEAN standard for GAP and its integration in each AMS's national program was delivered by Mr. Gilberto Layese, the former director of the Bureau of Agriculture and Fisheries Product Standards (BAFPS) and one of the prime movers of ASEAN GAP. He presented a brief history of the development of the standard, a definition of GAP in the regional context including brief discussion of the four (4) modules of the standard, progress of the activities of the member states in support of the ASEAN Economic Blueprint, review of the new set of strategic approaches from 2013-2016 and introduction to the new AADCP project on ASEAN GAP. One of the highlights of his presentation was that through the project stream, the regional mechanism to manage ASEAN GAP was established – the Expert Working Group on ASEAN GAP (EWG ASEAN GAP).

### ***The private sector perspective on GAP***

Ms. Kerstin Uhlig, Manager of Corporate Relations of GLOBALG.A.P., and Mr. Kit Chan, Director of K-Farms in Malaysia, shared their experiences and their perspective in implementing and adopting GAP standards.

As one of the largest organizations implementing private and commercial GAP standards in the world, Ms. Uhlig informed the AMSs on what GLOBALG.A.P is, how it is developed and managed, acceptance of GLOBALG.A.P certification, harmonization of local GAP standards and GLOBALG.A.P, and harmonization of national GAP schemes through benchmarking. She explained that the GLOBALG.A.P standard is based on HACCP principles, Codex standards and EU regulations with 117 control points on food safety, 50 points on environment including biodiversity, 46 points on traceability, and 21 points on worker welfare.

Ms. Uhlig emphasized that criteria including those of local GAP standards should be auditable. GLOBALG.A.P. as a certification scheme relies on independent third (3<sup>rd</sup>) party certification bodies as partners in implementation. In these activities, the GLOBALG.A.P secretariat facilitates the certification systems and drafts the contracts or memoranda of understanding (MOU) with national accreditation bodies (Abs) and as of this year has 140

licensing contracts with CBs. Prior to signing of contracts, the secretariat has to ensure that these accredited organizations deliver consistent training on the provisions of the standard, and are credible and coherent in applying the standard.

Ms. Uhlig provided information that in the ASEAN region, most accreditation bodies are publicly and government-owned. She further noted that there are also National Technical Working Groups (NTWGs) established in India, China, Thailand and Japan. NTWGs provide valuable input in the standard setting and have the possibility to develop national interpretation guidelines that relate to their national legislation. Moreover, members normally discuss and finalize internal standard with slight revisions of the GLOBALG.A.P standard to make it adoptable in their national setting.

Mr. Chan shared the success story of a farmer group that was successful in having its operation certified under GLOBALG.A.P, thereby, paving the way to gain market access to European retailers. In hindsight, the K-Farm GAP Program was developed as a private sector initiative drawn from the need to change Carambola cultivation practices due to constantly changing market conditions and requirements. He observed that on their own, small and rural farmers have limited resources to achieve the quality and food safety standards to access competitive markets. Mr. Chan attributed the success of the project to the forged commitment between K-Farm and contracted growers. He observed that the contract signing was one of the program's milestones and contributory to the realization of set goals.

In conclusion, Mr. Chan posed two points for study and debate. First, government authorities have spent valuable resources to set up voluntary food safety standards only to find out later that these are over-ridden by privately owned and led standards which are subsequently adopted and supported by retailers. Second, is it a sustainable strategy for producers to fully rely on private standards in the quest for recognition and compliance to food safety standards?

### **Session 3: An ASEAN organic standards scheme: Key opportunities and challenges in developing regional organic standards and a system for recognizing conformity assessment**

#### ***Introductory presentation (some generic lessons to be learned from the GOMA-Asia and harmonization of standards schemes for the ASEAN Economic Community)***

Ms. Diane Bowen, member of the UNFSS support team, discussed the generic lessons from the GOMA-Asia project, harmonization of standards schemes for the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) and noted the efforts and progress made by the Special Task Force for the ASEAN Standard for Organic Agriculture (TFASOA). Ms. Bowen highlighted the tools developed by the GOMA-Asia project specifically that that can be used in comparing and assessing organic standards and technical regulations. During the implementation of the GOMA project from 2009-2012, the members believed that there must be a robust tool to assess standards in the region. She also informed the AMSs about GOMA Asia's work towards development of an ASEAN Organic Mutual Recognition Agreement (MRA) wherein potential models were developed geared towards establishing multilateral recognition among AMSs. The working group looked at various components, which is very consistent with the framework of the ASEAN MRAs.

Ms. Bowen also highlighted that the GOMA Asia results constitute a rich pool of resources that ASEAN can incorporate in the development of a system for harmonization and recognition of organic standards schemes in AEC. These results are already calibrated to the ASEAN framework and guidelines.

Mr. Layese, in response to this development presented by Ms. Bowen, stated that the Philippines and particularly the BAFPS can serve as the focal point whenever activities on developing MRAs on organic agriculture are concerned. The delegation of Malaysia welcomed this initiative by the Philippines.

On a related note, Ms. Uhlig expressed the willingness of the GLOBALG.A.P program to assist AMSs in conceptualizing and implementing localG.A.P. programs anchored in GLOBALG.A.P standards.

### ***Vision and objectives in developing the ASEAN organic standard***

Ms. Lara Vivas, technical secretariat of the TFASOA and reporting on behalf of the Chairman, briefed the forum on the outputs of the first workshop held in the Philippines. Her report included the following salient points: terms of reference (TOR) of the task force, scheduled activities considering the scope of work, second draft of the ASOA and first draft of the Strategic Plan of Action for ASEAN Organic Agriculture (SPAOA).

### ***The private sector perspective on developing an ASEAN organic standard***

The ripple effect of a harmonized organic standard within the ASEAN region was discussed by Mr. Patrick Belisario, President of the Organic Producers and Traders Association (OPTA). He noted key opportunities and challenges in developing the regional standard and a system for recognizing conformity assessments. One of the key challenges is possible competition or distrust among certification bodies and schemes. On the other hand, he laid out key opportunities for developing a system for recognizing CBs.

Citing the trade of organic goods among AMSs, Mr. Balasario noted that it is limited at the moment. This may be due to the fact that most member countries are oriented towards lucrative markets like Europe and North America. Thus, there could be less trading among members, which have the same conditions for production and line-up of products. As a result, the AMSs are competing for the same niche market within the region.

### ***Standard-supportive activities of the Asian Development Bank: Regional cooperation on sustainable standard – GMS Core Agriculture Support Program, 2011-2020 (CASP Phase II)***

Dr. Sununtar Setboonsarng, Principal Natural Resources and Agriculture Economist from the Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture Division of the ADB informed the AMSs about the core agriculture support program of the ADB including the funded projects on GAP and organic agriculture. She listed key activities of ADB on standards which include private-public partnership (PPP), participatory guarantee system (PGS), training of local inspectors to lower the cost of certification, implementation of traceability and electronic-trade systems, and launching of pilot projects on innovative PPP investments to scale up climate-friendly practices.

Dr. Setboonsarng explained that ADB is guided by three (3) pillars for institutional mechanisms for regional cooperation: building global competitiveness by promoting food safety, promote climate-friendly agriculture and natural resource management and promoting agriculture as leader in providing rural renewable energy. Under pillar 1, activities are related to food safety standards harmonization. ADB has paid attention to organic agriculture systems through capacity building initiatives for formal and informal certification systems. Through this smallholder farmers are able to gain market access. Pillar 2 aims to promote climate-friendly agriculture that in turn will mitigate the climate change risk. Pillar 3 concentrates on initiatives on biomass management for energy and food security. Dr. Setboonsarng highlighted the ADB-funded regional cooperation program in the Greater Sub-Mekong Region, which aims to transform growth into economic perspective.

### ***Open Forum***

A member from the delegation of Malaysia suggested that a forum in collaboration with UNFSS team be conducted back-to-back with the meetings of the either the TF on ASEAN Standard for Horticultural Produce and Other Food Crops (MASHP) or Special TFASOA. As an alternative Malaysia offered to support this forum.

### **Session 4: The specific contribution of UNFSS to national and regional management of VSS: Seeking feedback on UNFSS priority activities and their relevance for ASEAN**

Ms. Mary Grace Mandigma, on behalf the Director of BAFPS, presented the government perspective on how UNFSS platform can assist the ASEAN region. On implementation of GAP, the platform can provide technical assistance at the national level to Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar (CLM Counties) in implementing programs and projects identified in the Needs Assessment Study conducted under the AADC Project Stream. The platform can also provide support to the other AMSs in further narrowing the issues and concerns on alignment. Meanwhile on organic agriculture, UNFSS can provide help to Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia and Myanmar in developing their own national organic agriculture program. These countries also need to increase their capacity regarding inspection and certification for organic agriculture.

The private sector perspective was presented by Mr. Chuenprayoth. He recommended the following activities that the platform can study and further deliberate on:

- providing support funds to set up GAP working groups for public & private sectors;
- providing support funds for translation and interpretation of the ThaiGAP standard to local languages in ASEAN countries, with the primary aim that it be used as a reference material for developing workable and implementable GLOBALG.A.P local standards;
- arranging a high-level meeting for the successful implementation of benchmarking process of food safety standard between ASEAN and China;
- looking into how Thailand's experience can be used as a case study for AMSs to consider and possibly follow. The UNFSS platform may take necessary discussion with the ASEAN Secretary in order to increase the cooperation between the government and private sectors in the ten (10) AMSs. This will basically focus on implementing private food safety standards.

The Summary of Discussions and the Closing Remarks was given by Ms. Karen Kristine A. Roscom, Chief of the Standards Division of the BAFPS.





A Platform of International Dialogue on Voluntary Sustainability Standards

## ANNEX ONE

**UNFSS Regional Briefing Session for ASEAN**  
**Jointly Organized by UNFSS and the Bureau of Agriculture and Fisheries Product**  
**Standards, Department of Agriculture of the Philippines**  
**October 24, 2013**

**UNFSS Mission Statement:** The UNFSS is a platform created to provide information, analysis and capacity-building assistance on voluntary sustainability standards (VSS) with a particular focus on the potential value of VSS as tools for developing countries to achieve their sustainable development goals. Key decision-makers from governments and the private sector in developing countries should be sufficiently informed about the strategic importance and main policy requirements of VSS in order to develop proactive strategies that maximize the developmental contribution and export market access benefits of those standards, while reducing their potential problematic impacts.

**Briefing Session Theme:** Policy Making and Sustainability Standards: How can governments and private sector work together to achieve sustainable development goals and facilitate market access?

8:30-8:50      Registration

9:00-10:30    **Welcome and Introduction: Present perspectives, experience and view of VSS - Nexus between regulatory and private standards: discussion on governmental concerns**

- Welcome speech by Director Andrew B. Villacorta, Regional Executive Director, Department of agriculture Regional Field Unit III.
- Presentation on UNFSS objectives, added value and priority activities for 2014-2015, Ulrich Hoffmann, UNCTAD
- VSS from an ASEAN perspective, including their importance for the forthcoming ASEAN common market Mr. Noel De Luna, Head, International Relations Division, Department of Agriculture, Philippines)
- Presentation by UNFSS partner organizations (FAO, ITC, UNEP and UNIDO) on relevant VSS activities in the ASEAN region

10:30-10:50    Q & A session

10:50-11:10    Coffee break

- 11:10-12:30 **Good Agricultural Practice (GAP) programmes and commercial GAP standards: Their coexistence and modular approaches to serve different domestic and international market segments**
- Introductory presentation (speaker: UNCTAD representative, based on GAP study in Asia)
  - Lessons to be learned from the Thai approach to GAP (speaker, Mr. Chusak Chuenprayoth, Board of Trade and ThaiGAP Institute)
  - The role of ASEAN GAP in the future common market (Mr. Gilberto Layese, former Director of BAFPS, Philippines)
  - The private sector perspective on GAP (Ms. Kerstin Uhlig, Manager Corporate Relations, GLOBALG.A.P. c/o FoodPlus GmbH, Mr. Kit Chan, Director, K-Farms, Malaysia)
- 12:30-12:50 Q & A session
- 12:50-14:10 Lunch break
- 14:10-15:10 **An ASEAN organic standards scheme: Key opportunities and challenges in developing regional organic standards and a system for recognizing conformity assessment**
- Introductory presentation (some generic lessons to be learned from the GOMA-Asia and harmonization of standards schemes for the ASEAN Economic Community, speaker: Ms. Diane Bowen, UNFSS support team)
  - Vision and objectives in developing the ASEAN organic standard (Ms. Lara Vivas, Technical Secretariat of the Special Task Force on the ASEAN Standard for Organic Agriculture)
  - The private sector perspective on developing an ASEAN organic standard (Mr. Patrick Belisario, Organic Producers' Trade Association Philippines)
  - Standard-supportive activities of the Asian Development Bank (Dr. Sununtar Setboonsarng, Principal Natural Resources and Agriculture Economist, Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture Division, ADB)
- 5:10-15:30 Q & A session
- 16:00-16:30 **The specific contribution of UNFSS to national and regional management of VSS: Seeking feedback on UNFSS priority activities and their relevance for ASEAN**
- The government perspective (Mr. Leo P. Cañeda, Director, BAFPS, Department of Agriculture, Philippines)
  - The private sector perspective (Mr. Chusak Chuenprayoth, Board of Trade and ThaiGAP Institute)
- 16:30-16:50 Q & A session
- 16:50-17:00 Summary of the discussion and closure of the meeting

## **ANNEX TWO**

**REGIONAL BRIEFING FOR THE ASEAN  
UNITED NATIONS FORUM ON SUSTAINABILITY STANDARDS (UNFSS)  
24 October 2013, Holiday Inn Hotel, Clarkfield, Angeles City**

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